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## Transformation of Baumgarten's aesthetics into a tool for analysing works and for modelling

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# **'Transformation of Baumgarten's aesthetics into a tool for analysing works and for modelling – a methodological study'.**

## **Abstract:**

Is this the best form, or does it need further work? The aesthetic object does not possess the perfect qualities; but how do I proceed with the form? These are questions that all modellers ask themselves at some point, and with which they can grapple for days – even weeks – before the inspiration to deliver the form finally presents itself. This was the outlet for our plan to devise a tool for analysing works and the practical development of forms. The tool is a set of cards with suggestions for investigations that may assist the modeller in identifying the weaknesses of the form, or convince him-/herself about its strengths. The cards also contain aesthetical reflections that may be of inspiration in the development of the form.

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## **1. Introduction:**

The focus of this investigation is the practice that is related to the production of artefacts – three-dimensional forms that are physically present in the room. Every once in a while art historians and modellers have unveiled some of the considerations and approaches that formed the basis of the artistic development process, which, as opposed to the art historian's analysis of such a creation, form a part of the practitioners creation. Few have taken the time to express such considerations and tricks (described approaches) in the form of searchable keywords, or to catalogue them in collected works.

Therefore, it is quite time-consuming to search for aesthetical considerations that aid in the clarification of the strengths/weaknesses of the form and tricks to remedy the weaknesses that may appear. Furthermore, many aesthetical reflections and tricks have never been codified as, according to Peter Dormer, traditionally, modelling is a profession that is developed and communicated through its practice (Cf. section 3 The Problem). We consider texture, colour, gloss and title as qualities pertaining to the form.

Baumgarten suggested that 'what is created under the pressure of inspiration must ultimately be subjected to an inspection and possibly be aesthetically improved' [Brandt, 1968, p. 69]. Thus, it is assumed that the part of the design process that is occupied with acknowledging obscure ideas lies outside the field of application of rules and regulations. Likewise, we will not concern ourselves with this part of the process in the present study, but rather pick up on the process at the point of clarifying the combined/guiding theme.

## **2. Reading model for aesthetical reflections and tricks:**

We must be able to do something about this lack of aesthetical considerations and tricks, and the sooner we begin to collect the ones supplied by older artists, the more of them will be of benefit to future designers. Consequently, we have:

- Devised a method for reading the modeller's analysis of works (own and others'), and for reading the designer's reflections on the genesis of works.

The reading method is founded on the notion that Baumgarten's reflections (on which we will elaborate in section 4 Why use Baumgarten's reflections as a point of departure?) can stimulate the modeller to remember his/her own reflections. This notion is based on the thesis that Baumgarten's reflections are still in use and can be used as a starting point for the formulation of the framework for an interview. In order not to exceed what we consider to be reasonable in terms of time spent on interviews, we have had to limit the number of guidelines to be used in the material serving as a source of inspiration. We have verified that Baumgarten's reflections are still in use through a methodological study in which we have:

- Examined whether modellers remember having used any aesthetical reflections corresponding to Baumgarten's, i.e. whether they have made similar reflections during their development of forms.

If the modeller has arrived at the conclusion that the form is as it should be by way of a number of reflections, which, in turn, serve as strong arguments for making such a conclusion, then everything is as it should be. If, on the other hand, the modeller by way of said reflections concludes that the form has a number of weaknesses, having identified such weaknesses will hardly suffice as a foundation for rectifying weaknesses or for creating a new and improved form. Consequently, we asked ourselves how can the tricks modellers use for developing a form or for speeding up the modelling process be read? Donald A. Nordman [Nordman, p. 53] has devised a highly acknowledged method for reading user behaviour. The method is applied in order to establish whether products are elaborated appropriately in relation to their intended use, and whether their actual use corresponds to the designer's intentions. Similarly, we wish to read what it is that a modeller does with a product, i.e. a form, in order to make it work as an aesthetical object rather than an article for everyday use. Both cases display a desire to register behaviour, and we arrived at the thesis that it had to be possible to adapt Nordman's method to be applicable for a reading of the tricks that modellers use for advancing a form from one stage of development to the next.

- In the course of an ongoing modelling process, the modeller is encouraged to:
  - 1) State the target – What do you want to achieve?
  - 2) State the intentions – How do you want to achieve the target?
  - 3) Specify the trick – What must you do/which actions must you perform?
  - 4) Perform the trick – Observe the actual actions of the modeller while performing the trick?
  - 5) Register the development of the form – Which transformation takes place in the form while the trick is being performed?
  - 6) Evaluate the form (in context if possible) – What was the result of the trick?
  - 7) Evaluate the process – Did the trick yield surprising results that benefited the form?

Tricks read through the use of this model may be so specifically tied to the development of a single form that a subsequent generalisation is necessary.

### **3. The Problem:**

The very moment the individual modeller begins to doubt the strength of a given form or seeks a basis for developing a weak form he/she is faced with three problems:

- Lack of experience in applying aesthetical reflections in the analysis of forms and in the application of tricks in the development of the form.

- Lacking availability of existing aesthetical reflections and tricks useful for furthering the artistic process of development.
- Many of the existing aesthetical reflections are aimed at another artistic medium than the one a given designer works with and are therefore not directly applicable in practice.

The cause for some of these problems has been revealed by design researcher Peter Dormer. He concluded that the creators work more or less intuitively and develop their art through the practice of the art itself. In other words, it is the artistic acts by which the artist examines and attempts to reveal connections that leads to the development of the rules of the trade. Such a production of knowledge, in turn, also produces its own complex systems of values that, in principle, are solely demonstrated and tested through artistic practice. [Zettersten, 2002, p.25]

This is the reason why the present study has taken the form of a methodological study in which the methodological approach is inspired by e.g. Bjarne Hjort Andersen who asked: ‘can you ask a person about his/her way of life?’ [Andersen, 1993, p.18-41]. Similarly, the central question of this study may be formulated in the following way: ‘Can you ask a person about his/her artistic practice?’ Or rather: ‘How can you read a person’s practice?’ A practice that results in the creation of a form of aesthetic quality, which consist of a number of acts that in our study are boiled down to a reading of aesthetical reflections in addition to tricks for developing forms and for furthering the creative process.

#### **4. Why use Baumgarten’s reflections as a point of departure?**

The development of a tool for analysing works is founded in Baumgarten’s numerous reflections because they press for a consideration of what composes the character of a work at a given stage in its development, namely a more or less complete synthesis of matter, technique and form, whilst simultaneously pointing to this as being increasingly significant as the work progresses through the various stages of development. This was the exact type of reflection that we sought. Further, Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten is the founder of contemporary aesthetics, and by using his ‘Philosophical Reflections on Poetry’ from 1735 as our point of departure, we have elected to base our study on the original reflections. The dissertation focused on poetry as the artistic medium, and, even though he in his later and unfinished work ‘Aesthetica I-II’ from 1750 – 1758 expanded aesthetics to include all the artistic branches, it is still unclear how similar reflections can be formulated regarding artefacts. The dissertation was written in German and grounded in a German culture that in many ways has had a large influence on Danish culture wherefore Baumgarten’s mode of thought does not appear altogether unfamiliar to us even though the language of Baumgarten’s numerous rules and regulations is somewhat distant from everyday language. Therefore, we are very much indebted to Per Aage Brandt for having completed a Danish translation that we have been able to use in our work. [Brandt, 1968]

Among Baumgarten’s reflections there is also a thesis stating that there are a number of guidelines that can serve as modelling stimuli. Based on our own experiences we have selected the reflections that we perceived to be most easily accessible. It would be best if we could test whether the chosen reflections may function as modelling stimuli through practical application. In connection with the present methodological study we have attempted to verify the usefulness of the reflections by reading: the designer’s memory of having reached a decision on whether to follow the recommendation of a given guideline.

Whether or not the interview-frame that we have established with recourse to Baumgarten’s reflections can also be used to inspire designers to supply their own reflections, and thereby contribute in the communication of the development that has taken place since 1735, is still an open question.

## 5. Transformation of a selection of Baumgarten's reflections.

Baumgarten's reflections must be transformed (reinterpreted/translated) from charting guidelines for the production of aesthetical poetry to aesthetical forms. Moreover, the reflections must be transformed into questions before to the selected reflections are applicable as an interview-frame.

This framework is established by dividing the selected guidelines into those that relate to the creation of forms (f) and those that relate to the analysis of the work (a)

In terms of modelling, the interview was based on the following guidelines:

*§ XVIII. The more objects are determined, the more is encompassed in their representation; but the more is amassed in a confused, clearer representation, the extensively clearer must it be, and the more poetic. Determining the objects to be represented in a poem as much as possible is poetic.*

Suggested transformation: It is aesthetic to determine the subjects to be expressed through an artefact as much as possible.

Question      1.f: Do you attach any importance to determining the subject (the theme) that you want expressed in an artefact before beginning the process of creating a form?

*§ XVII. In the extensively clear representations more is represented in a sensitive manner than in the not so clear, whereby they contribute more to the perfection of the poem. The extensively clear representations are therefore especially poetic.*

Suggested transformation: In order to be extensively clear the expression of the artefact needs not be understood in all the details, but the principal features of its theme must be readable. If the structure is also acknowledgeable, the artefact is especially aesthetic.

Questions      2.f: Is a clarification of how the principal features of the theme can be expressed through the matter a part of your preparations?  
3.f: Do you simultaneously establish how the theme can be presumed to be able to organise the matter?  
4.f: Is the main subject hereby determined, or would you say that this is insufficient in itself?

*§ LXVIII. To determine the sensations and imaginations, which are not themes, through the poetical theme is poetic, for if they are not determined hereby, neither are they connected to it, and it is the connection that is poetic.*

Suggested transformation: Are the sensations and imaginations, which are not themes, attached to the work through their connections, then it is the connections that are aesthetic.

Questions      5.f: Do you process the connections as independent, significant elements?  
6.f: And/or do you pay special attention to the details?

*§ XX. When the casual identifying traits of the family determine the species, and when the genetic traits of a higher family determine a lower family, representations of the species and the lower family are more poetic than representations of the family, respective of the higher family.*

Suggested transformation: The species determines the common traits of the families belonging to that species, and knowledge of a lower species specifies the traits that characterise this lower family whereas the knowledge of a higher family only elaborates the description of the species.

Questions     7.f: Do you work towards achieving a sense of family between the artefacts you create?  
                  8.f: If YES, what is the purpose of creating artefacts with such family ties?  
                  It must be inquired whether the intention is to examine the possibilities of a theme/matter.

*§ XXI. An EXAMPLE is a representation of something more specific used to clarify the representation of something less specific.*

Suggested transformation: An example (or a specific artefact) can be used to clarify the representation of the utterance (message).

Question     9.f: Do you work consciously towards communicating the generally acknowledged through a case = example?

*§ XLVIII. When something wondrous is to be represented something in the least about its representation must be recognised as confused; that is to say that the appropriate mixture of the known with the unknown in the wondrous itself is highly poetic.*

Suggested transformation: In a representation of the wondrous the known should be appropriately mixed with the unknown.

Question     10.f: Do you work with mixtures of the known and the unknown in the process of creating a form?

Choice of title:

*§ XXIII. A concept A, which, without possessing the characteristics of concept B, is represented in juxtaposition with it is said to be ATTACHED to it, and the concept to which the other is attached is called a COMPOSITE/complexus/CONCEPT as opposed to a SIMPLE CONCEPT whereto nothing is attached. As a composite concept represents more than a simple concept, the confused, complex concepts are extensively clearer than the simple concepts, and they are therefore more poetic.*

Suggested transformation: If a composite or complex concept is chosen for the title, an extensively clearer expression is achieved than if a simple concept is chosen.

Questions     11.f: Do you use simple or complex expressions as titles for your artefacts?  
                  12.f: Have you ever considered whether a simple or a complex expression infuses the artefact with the clearest and most profound meaning as an artefact?

The methodological study has comprised six experienced artists and two designers with a minimum of 10 years of experience. As illustrated in table 1, they recognised most of the reflections to some degree. This part of the interview-frame worked to our satisfaction in spite of the practically inclined artists' finding the questions somewhat academic.

Table 1: The use of the reflections in modelling

Baum-garten §	Questions no.	User:	Number	Comments to the question (The number refers to the respondent)	Card title
XVIII	1.f.	# 0    0 <sup>7</sup>	6	7) it is unclear what the modelling process comprises.	Main subject/theme
XVII	2.f.	#   θ <sup>5</sup>   0	6	5) does not understand the concept of main subject, and the interviewer is unable to explain it.	
	3.f.	0   # θ ? θ 0	3		Organisation/ orchestration
	4.f.	<sup>1</sup>   <sup>2</sup> 0 θ θ 0 θ ?	2	1) limitations 2) the functions, aesthetical and ethical values.	
LXVIII	5.f.	<sup>2</sup>   0   0	6	2) in the meaning of a mutual language. Several needed an explanation about the meaning of connections.	Connections
	6.f.	0 0 0 0	4		
XX	7.f.	<sup>1</sup>     0 ?     #	6	1) to obtain coherence in terms of exhibitions	Family
	8.f.	<sup>2</sup>   <sup>3</sup> θ θ   <sup>6</sup> 0 0	*	2) recognisability, 3) reflect a development 6) create harmony and serenity	
XXI	9.f.	# 0   0   0 0 0	3		The example
XLVIII	10.f.	0 <sup>3</sup> 0 <sup>4</sup> θ     ?	3	3) and 4) examine the possibilities inherent in the archetype	
XXIII	11.f.	? 0   0   0 ?	3		Complex/ Composite
	12.f.	0 0 θ θ θ ?	2		

Explanation for signatures used in the tables:

\* inquiry has been made as to the reason for application

| = uses the reflection

0 = does not use the reflection

? = the answer is inconclusive regarding whether or not the reflection is being used

# = The reflection is used in some cases and not in others. This has been taken into account in the listed number of users.

θ = The question has not been answered.

The respondents were:

1. Agnete Brittasius
2. Poul Bækthøj
3. Kjeld Ravn Dalsgård
4. Liselotte Frankild
5. Helle Hove
6. Jessie Husum
7. Erland Knudssøn Madsen
8. Henrik Vilhelm Voldmester

The following order has been applied in the columns of the table: User. No. 4 and 5 have an education in design. No. 6 has a form of artistic education. The remaining interviewees are more or less autodidact as modellers (i.e. they have received an education by attending courses and workshops).

In terms of analysing works, the interview was based on the following guidelines:

*§ XIII Obscure representations do not contain so many representations of characteristics that they suffice in recognising the represented and distinguish it from other things; but these, on the other hand, are present in clear representations (by definition); thus, more parts will contribute to the communication of sensitive representations if they are clear than if they are obscure. Thus, a poem with clear representations is more perfect than one with obscure representations, and clear representations are more poetic than obscure representations.*

Suggested transformation: A work with a clear expression has many characteristics and is more perfect than one with fewer characteristics whereby it appears to be more obscure. Clear expressions are more aesthetic than obscure expressions.

Questions      1.a: Do you consider the clarity of expression in your works?  
                     2.a: and whether the expression has many characteristics?

*§ XLV. We usually notice objects that contain something wondrous; and if the objects we notice are represented in a confused manner, they are represented extensively clearer than those that we fail to notice. Thus, representations that contain something wondrous are more aesthetic than those that contain no such thing.*

Suggested transformation: A work that contains something wondrous, i.e. something that we notice, is more aesthetic than the ones we do not notice.

Questions      3.a: The artefacts you notice at e.g. an exhibition, do they cause you to consider whether they contain something wondrous?  
                     4.a: and if the wondrous is expressed ambiguously making it subject to different interpretations?

*§ LXVI. That, the representation of which comprises a cause sufficient for other representations, which appear in speech, but which in itself does not comprise sufficient cause for being contained in others, is a THEME.*

*§ LXVII. If there are several themes, they are not connected; consider that A is a theme and B likewise; if they were connected, either A would have sufficient cause in B; or B in A, and so either B or A would not*



*be a theme. Then, however, their connection is poetic; a poem that contains only one theme is more perfect than one that contains several themes.*

Suggested transformation: If the work only has one theme (main subject), and this theme is sufficient cause for the content, the work is particularly aesthetic.

Questions     5.a: When you behold/analyse the work, do you consider whether its main subject organises the matter?  
                  6.a: and if the main subject is sufficient cause for the presence of the matter/elements?

*§ LXXI. The general rule for a luminescent method is this: the poetic representations must be followed in immediate extension of each other so that the theme is presented gradually clearer and clearer. As the theme should be presented in a sensitive manner, its extensive clarity is the aspiration. But if the earlier representations are represented more clearly than the subsequent, the subsequent do not contribute to a poetic representation of the them, which they should do; later representations should render the theme clearer than earlier representations.*

Suggested transformation: The general rule for the luminescent method is this: The artistic expressions must follow in immediate extension of each other, so that the theme is gradually presented clearer and clearer. Follow in immediate extension of each other means that the closer you get to the work, the more details must be acknowledgeable in work and theme alike.

Question     7.a: Do you consider whether your works are structured in a way that the closer you get to it (be it physically or through analysis), the more details become acknowledgeable in work and theme alike?

*§ LXXIV. Absolute brevity, or inner brevity / intrinsece / is speech that does not contain anything that could have been forsaken without damage to its degree of perfection. As this brevity is demanded of all speech, so too is it demanded of the poem.*

The wish for brevity and extensive clarity expressed by Baumgarten can be transformed into a guideline, which recommends using as limited a number of requisites as possible in order to communicate a given set of values to the user and the general public, thereby making the signal as clear as possible.

Question     8.a: Is it a significant quality of your artefacts that they are stripped of redundant parts/details?

*§ CX. Representations of nature, i.e. of the inner principle of changes in the universe and the events that such change entails, are never immediately clear, and neither do they pertain to reason. On the contrary, they are of great extensive clarity, and as such poetic. Thus, nature produces (insofar as we can speak of the essence as a phenomenon that entails events in addition to the essence itself) the imagery of the poet. The poem is therefore an imitation of nature and the events that are conditioned by it.*

Works that are grounded in nature, i.e. in the inner principle of changes in the universe and the events that such change entails, are never immediately clear, and neither do they pertain to reason, but they are sensitive and yet extensively clear, and as such artistic. Thus, nature produces forms which look like something else. Works can therefore be fruitfully created with a point of departure in the universe's inner principle of change. Organic design or BIONICS.

Questions     9.a: Is a vivid expression a significant aspect of an artefact?  
                  10.a: Is fickleness in itself a significant quality?

Table 2: The use of the reflections in the analysis of works

Baumgarten §	Questions no.	User:	Number	Comments to the question	Card title
XIII.	1.a.	    0 <sup>7</sup>	7	7) clarification is perceived as a part of the process of modelling.	Clear
	2.a.	0   0    0	5	Several of the interviewees do not perceive a connection between clarity of expression and several characteristics.	
XLV.	3.a.	<sup>2</sup>    θ    <sup>7</sup>	7	2) the wondrous is a characteristic of the artistic expression, and the reflection is therefore assumed to be in use. 7) the focus is shifted from a quality in the object to a state in the beholder.	Wondrous
	4.a.	# 0    θ ?	5		
LXVI. + LXVII.	5.a.	 θ 0	6		?
	6.a.	<sup>1</sup>    ? θ θ 0	4	1) but there may well be something that is not part of the main subject	
LXXI	7.a.	    0	7		Detail
LXXIV.	8.a.	0    0 0	5		Absolute simplicity
CX.	9.a.	0   0 # <sup>5</sup>   0 0	4	5) it must be made clear that the inquiry is about qualities pertaining to the object, and not about people's treatment of it A definition of what is meant by 'vivid expression' is must be presented.	Vivid expression
	10.a.	0 θ   ? 0	5		Variation/ fickleness

As is evident from tables 1 and 2, some of the tested reflections were much more widespread than others. On the basis of the investigations, the examined guidelines can be presumed to still be in use. During the interviews it was necessary to elaborate on the meaning of some of the questions – in this context we made a sketch exemplifying an application. As a consequence we came up with the idea of illustrating the reflections.

## 6. The usefulness of the developed reading models.

The model for the interviews is based on some of Baumgarten's reflections, and it illustrates that not only are the reflections in use, but also that there is a big difference in the degree to which individual modellers make such considerations. None of the interviewees were familiar with Baumgarten's reflections or anything to that effect in advance. During the interviews we used a Dictaphone to record the answers, and the written answers have been shown to the respondents in order to allow for additional comments. We can only hope that in the future the respondents will benefit from their new knowledge about Baumgarten's reflections.

We did not manage to collect any new reflections during the interviews, but we were presented with two tricks. The first is supplied by Agnete Brittasius and concerns keeping one's focus on the target:

***Take your bearing at the turn of the month:***

*At the turn of the year purchase 7 – 9 calendars with illustrations that you find inspirational.*

*On the first of each month, as you turn the page and uncover a new illustration, consider whether the illustration can inspire you to take a particular approach to the tasks that lie ahead.*

*Consider what you want to achieve in the coming month.*

*Make a list of what you achieved in the month that just passed. Take the time to rejoice about what you achieved.*

*Consider whether there was anything you did not achieve, and if it is putting a damper on your creativity. If so, the first objective of the month is getting that done.*

The second is supplied by Erland Knudssøn Madsen about:

***Making a plan for selecting the material:***

*A palette is a plate onto which you deposit the colours selected for the task. More abstractly speaking, it has to do with making a plan for the collection and selection of materials for an actual task. The selection is carried out as a part of the preparations for the materialisation of the work, and as a part of the clarification or delimitation of the field of possible solutions.*

Primarily, the interviewees worked with sculptures that consisted of connected single parts or of few elements. Therefore, the question regarding use of main subject, guiding lines and organisation of the material was too weighty.

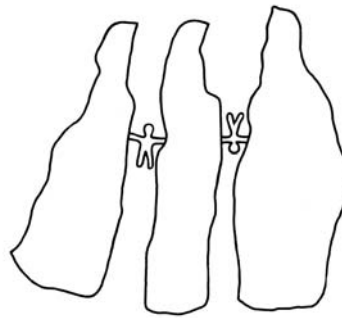
The model for reading tricks is based on making the observations and conducting the interview whilst the modelling is in process. Both reading models were forwarded along with the confirmation of the visiting agreement just prior to the visit. Nevertheless, the modellers had put themselves in a kind of sales situation in which unfinished projects were stowed away. Thus, we did not manage to test this reading model.

## 7. Aesthetics cards as a modelling tool

How do you solve the problem of lacking access to applicable aesthetical considerations and tricks as well as the modellers lacking knowledge about their application? As a basis for making a comparison we have investigated how the input for the creative processes is communicated, and we observed that tricks on cards developed by e.g. the design company IDEO work better than those presented in the encyclopaedia [www.ideo.com]. IDEO has succeeded in making the presentation of tricks for activating innovative processes and guidelines for user involvement almost self generating. IDEO started this development by making available their knowledge that many people were interested in making use of and to which many people were willing to contribute.

On this background we believe that cards with aesthetical reflections and tricks to modelling and tricks that support the working process and make it more goal-oriented will lead to a solution to the problems outlined in section 3. The first cards have been developed by supplementing the transformed reflections with illustrations exemplifying their content.

*Consider whether the connections should be given a particular meaning in order for the work to instil in the viewer a sensation that does not stem from the governing theme.*



Example of a card with illustration

## 8. Perspectives

If knowledge of the aesthetics cards is departed to e.g. seminars and workshops, this will probably reveal that more tricks and considerations are in use.

Dispatching the aesthetics cards a year before inquiring into their use will probably also give a clearer indication of their use and contribute to gathering new reflections.

We would be very grateful for information regarding other reflections or tricks in use within the field of study.

Maintaining Baumgarten's reflections in their original form has not been a goal in itself; but in the course of this investigation we have often discussed how far we can remove ourselves from the original text and still claim to investigate whether Baumgarten's reflections are still in use.

We would much appreciate suggestions as to how the reading model for tricks could be made functional.

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